

WESTERN NEWS

Project eyes smoother pathway for immigrants

By Paul Mayne
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When most people think immigration, they picture Vancouver, Toronto or Montreal as destinations for the more than 250,000 newcomers arriving each year to Canada. That would be correct.

But a Western-led immigration study, however, hopes to open the door for newcomers to settle in medium and small communities across the country as well.



Victoria Esses

The Pathways to Prosperity Partnership (P2P) is led by project founder and principal investigator Victoria Esses, a Psychology professor and director of the Centre for Research on Migration and Ethnic Relations at Western. P2P is a seven-year initiative bringing together more than 180 collaborators from 50 universities, along with 100 community and government partners, from across the country.

"We plan to equip community organizations and governments, including municipal governments, with the tools they need to devise and implement evidence-based strategies that promote inclusion, local development and economic and social sustainability," said Esses, who received a \$2.5 million grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the project.

This large network will explore any and all immigration practices, policies and programs, Esses said. Along with looking at the larger urban centres, an emphasis will be placed on how to attract – and retain – newcomers to Northern and remote cities and towns, as well as Francophone-minority communities.

P2P sprouted from another research study Esses has ongoing, the Welcoming Communities Initiative, a study on promoting the integration of immigrants and minorities across Ontario. Three years into that five-year study, she decided to take the idea nationwide with the P2P, thus becoming an alliance of five regional nodes, with headquarters in the Atlantic, Quebec, Prairies, British Columbia and, of course, Ontario.

"This is a big one," Esses said of the partnership. "We're doing a lot of work that is policy relevant and relevant to the individual communities. Lot of times when we do studies they're done in one place. Our goal is to do comparative studies among all the regions, to generalize the findings more and to be able to merge the data." Immigrants do better when

they are able to get jobs faster, meaning they can contribute to the economy faster, Esses said. Canada's immigration policy is very economically focused, with approximately 60 per cent being 'economic immigrants,' and that is increasing, she added.

"There is a strategy to get immigrants out of the big cities and into smaller communities," Esses said. "Places like North Bay need immigrants and Toronto doesn't. So what type of services do you need and how do you attract them there? What information needs to be provided to them? How do you get that information to them to attract them there? This is important since small communities are not expanding; they're shrinking. They're looking for immigrants; whereas Toronto is glutted."

And once the immigrants land, we need to keep them here, Esses said. Often, immigrants come to Canada, but have trouble in education or employment, and then move elsewhere. "We don't want that to happen," she said. "There are a lot of countries now competing for what we call 'high-skilled immigrants.' New Zealand, Australia, even some European countries, are trying to get the best and brightest, and Canada is also trying to get those people to come here to settle and to stay."

"Getting them here isn't all of it."

The study will even look at international students and how the country can make it easier for them with the transition to becoming Canadian citizens upon graduation.

"Our policies in the past year have probably changed more than they have in the past 10-15 years," Esses said. "A lot of the work we'll be doing is going to be really practical. We have working relationships with all the provincial governments, with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Not only will we be collecting data that is relevant to them, but they will also be telling us 'these are questions that are really important to us.'"

"Instead of everyone reinventing learning from the ground up, we learn from each other. It makes us more forward-thinking and understanding what's worked and what hasn't worked."

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